

The 4th Sunday of Advent — December 22, 2019

This week, I was asked : **“Why don’t we have a ‘twofer’ a two for one special....a kind of a holiday special ? Why come to Mass today, and then back again on Tuesday or Wednesday ? Why not one Mass to cover both days ?”**

What a neat question ? I must confess I have asked myself a similar question along the way ! Sometimes this is the same question people ask after a Saturday Wedding Mass even when there was no Mass, just a wedding Ceremony ! Does it count Father ? — Count for what ? How do you configure these numbers ?

But, the answer to the question is: God doesn’t do ‘Twofers.’ The question itself betrays the ‘Truth’ in me I would like a short-cut an abbreviated versionand then be on my way. As one man said to me one day, “I just want my wafer and I’ll be on my way.” How interesting !!!!

There is no short version to this storyit is a terribly difficult and challenging experience to be a true Disciple in today’s world. It requires not just a small change but a huge **Radical Change**. It doesn’t work at all like the world does we all know that in our heads. **Knowing it in our hearts** is a totally different matter. A much more helpful question in my mind is : *How often do I personally choose to pick-up an extra Mass ? How often do I choose freely to come to a daily Mass so that I can be in communion with Him, and with His people ? It is just a much more helpful question !*

Last week, I asked you this question : **“If you or I could change the world to make it better, what one thing would you do to change it ?”**

I invited you to think about it as we approach the Christmas celebration. What one thing would you do ? One thing only ! Would you change something about yourself ? Or, about the plight of others ? I had a few people mention to me that they would work on the plight of othersHomelessness or the plight of Hunger ! Great thoughts wonderful ideas !

Today, I would like to narrow the scope What one thing would you do to change **YOURSELF?** I would like to reflect with you today on that question..... what one thing would I do to improve myself ? I talked to you last week about John the Baptist being in prison and behind those bars. He is having maybe ‘a little faith crisis’not unusual. Everybody, hopefully, has a ‘faith crisis’ in their lives It is one of the greatest opportunities of growth in the spiritual life. A faith that has never been challenged or tested is not really a faith it is merely an assurance of ‘all that I believe is true.’ There is no need for a God in such a reality.

I mentioned to you that we, like John the Baptist, are also in prison. But, our prison is self-made. There are no bars as Pablo d'Ors says, and strictly speaking it is not properly a jail. He says :

“We begin to ask ourselves, why have I lived locked in a jail with no bars ? And we go to its door. And we walk out. Meditating is that moment that we exit. We discover that the door has never been closed, that it is we who have closed it with a double turn of the key. That door is not a door— -- we invented it.”

What a profound truthlike John the Baptist, we send out messengers from our jail cell : **“Are you the ONE ? Or should we look for another ?**

Now in actual practice, and lived experience, our questions may be a little different ! Our questions may be more in the vein of :

Did you hear about so and so Let me tell you what I heard ? Wow what a scandal !

Did you hear ‘they’ are getting a divorce ? I can’t believe them of all people ?

I heard they left the church can you believe that ? And they were all up in everything Now they just up and leave ?

Did you hear the scandal about him/her ? I just can’t believe it can’t get my head around it ? Did somebody ask me to get my head around it ? Or, is this just another question from my self-made prison ?

Wow what a terrible prison to be living in what a need to be in control! What a need to know-it-all, and then either give it **My** stamp of approval or deny it. Such a prison, any prison, can be pretty bad, but this looks more like a stable than a prison.... which can also be pretty bad. A stable that stinks with the feces of animals and creatures a prison without bars !!!

Many people enjoy getting caught up in the ‘stables’ or scandals of others it seems that they just can’t help themselves they have a penchant for all of the ‘juicy’ details. In truth, it is not that they can’t help themselves it is that they *choose* not to help themselves. Perhaps it just helps us to not have to look at our own ‘stinky’ stable my own self-made prison.

This is why there are no ‘Twofer’s.’ There is no short-cut, as life might have us believe. Our good friend, Fr. Balsler, was laid to rest this week. What a great blessing that he has come to the fullness of life. There was a scandal that surrounded this final portion of his journey. How very sad I tried to visit him most every week since I got back from Ireland. I didn’t get there every week, but mostly, yes. What a teaching experience it was being in his presence. What a great brother priest.

I commend you the people of St. Paul for showing up in great numbers to his funeral. Good people find good things in all circumstances. Remember the couplet from last week :

**“Two men looked out from Prison Bars,
One saw mud the other saw stars.”**

What do you see when you look out from a self-made prison ? It makes all the difference !!!!

Let me tell you about the greatest scandal of all ! Do you want to hear it ? Please tell me, Yes ! WE just read about it ! Did you hear it ? Matthew, a reliable, faithful Jew, a follower of Jesus, tells all : This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about !!!!

Mary is found to be pregnant and her fiancé Joseph knows he is not the father. It's a scandalous situation. Our modern world would reflect 'either she was raped or had illicit relations with someone else.' I am sure there was many a shake of the head, and a great deal of recrimination. But Matthew, our brother, does not tarry with the details of the sordid story Thank God ! But, he wants to let us know that Our God came into the world in 'scandal.' Why would God do such a thing ?

Could it be because He wants us to get ready for a scandalous God in the flesh ? And all the while, He was confounding us in our 'righteousness' ? Jesus, born in 'scandal,' would continue to scandalize throughout His life. This is why He died the death of a common criminal..... the worst that could happen to one in our world. What a Scandal !

Let's take a closer look at His life !

He challenged the prevailing understanding of law, breaking bread with sinners, touching lepers, calling tax-collectors to follow Him, forgiving a woman caught in adultery, and making claims that sounded like blasphemy to 'the religious establishment.' Scandalous Scandalous Scandalous.....

So what does it all mean. ?

Why would it not mean an answer to the question I asked you to begin with? What one thing would you do to make the world a better place ?

Would you allow Him to be born in your stable this Christmas in your self-made prison ? That would certainly have a profound effect on our world !

—Fr. Gerry Hurley